

In support of World Population Day, the U.S. Mission would like to use this opportunity to draw attention to the issue of family planning and to highlight the seriousness of the situation.

This year's theme of "Being Young is Tough" is a very appropriate one for Nepal at this time. Nearly 40 percent of the population is under the age of 15 and approaching an age when they will start having children. With a current growth rate of 2.3%, Nepal's population will double in just 29 years. This population pressure will have severe consequences for health and education services, on an economy which is currently unable to provide gainful employment for all its' citizens, and on an increasingly polluted and degraded environment. Already population growth can be identified as the main cause of deforestation and loss of species in Nepal. And a recent study by USAID internationally found that in post-conflict countries where there is more than 40% youth population, the risk of returning to conflict within 10 years increases significantly.

For over 40 years, USAID has been working in partnership with the Government of Nepal in support of their family planning objectives. One of USAID/ Nepal's most successful programs is the establishing of family planning clinics in rural districts of Nepal. At these clinics, families learn about the options that are available and can discuss which is best for them. Additionally, family planning products are subsidized so as to be affordable for everyone. Due in part to this program, the use of contraceptives among women of reproductive age has risen from 3.0 percent in 1976 to 39.3 percent in 2001. The total fertility rate has declined from 6.3 births per woman to 3.5 in 2005.

But as remarkable as these achievements are, there is much to be done, and the future depends not only on the government, but on you as individuals as well. What can you do?

- If you are a parent, talk with your children about the dangers of being sexually irresponsible- about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and about the responsibility of being a parent and whether they are prepared for that now.
- If you are a man, remember that family planning is your responsibility too.
- If you are a teacher, encourage your school to introduce information about family planning at an appropriate time.
- If you are a kid, have fun being a kid, but think seriously about the future. About your future and the future of Nepal.

There are significant advantages to further expanding the use of family planning methods and decreasing the number of children per family. Infant mortality goes down. Fewer women die in

childbirth. By choosing how many children to have, and when to have them, a family's quality of life increases significantly. Decreased pressure on the economy and the environment mean a more sustainable future for all Nepalis.

Young people deserve a future where they will have access to good health care, the opportunity to get an education and to find employment, and a world where there is a healthy and intact natural environment. It is the responsibility of the adults today to create this for them. Let's not let them down.

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